

***Balclutha* Stop**

#21 Families at Sea

You're listening to "Maritime Voices" from San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. I'm ranger Mark Neuweld. In this episode, we'll consider the experiences of women and families at sea.

In 1889, the New York Times reported that ¼ of all sailing ships carried families. When the *Balclutha* left India in February, 1899, Captain Alfred Durkee was accompanied by his wife Alice. Upon arrival in San Francisco on May 27, *Balclutha* carried a passenger not recorded on her original sailing list. The local papers announced, "BORN AT SEA ON THE BALCLUTHA, Captain Durkee's Daughter Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep." A baby girl, named Inda Frances, was born in the Indian Ocean. There was no doctor aboard.

There were also times when a captain's wife played a pivotal role in the survival of a sailing ship. In 1856, the clipper *Neptune's Car* was westward bound for San Francisco by way of Cape Horn. Battling through strong gales while approaching the Horn, Captain Joshua Patten's exhaustion caused his hearing and eyesight to fail, and he was put to bed, raving deliriously. Previously, the first mate had been locked in irons for insubordination. The captain's wife, Mary Patten, took command. She was nineteen years old and four months pregnant. For fifty nights, she slept in her clothes. During one 48 hour period, she was constantly on deck, fighting for a chance to hoist some sail. She was fighting for the survival of her family-her sick husband and her unborn child. How did she view the wild ocean? Was the sea a barrier or a highway?

Mary Patten successfully commanded *Neptune's Car* to a safe arrival in San Francisco. She was praised not only for her love and devotion for her husband, but also for her skill and courage in commanding a large and valuable vessel. Her baby was born four months later.

Maritime traditions run deep. Why have sailors always considered their ships to be female? In the midst of dangerous and desolate waters, men relied upon their ships for sustenance and comfort. It was not until later in the 20th century that women began to shatter such traditional female roles, opening up new opportunities and new horizons for women at sea.

The National Park Service preserves the amazing stories of women at sea, providing a link between our past, our present, and our future.